



Dividing the island in two unequal halves, the craggy Cordón de los Dientes (with peaks rising over 1000m) shelters the narrow northern coast from southerly storms. The larger southern half of Isla Navarino is a roadless expanse of subantarctic tundra with hundreds of moorland ponds and the large lakes Lago Windhond and Lago Navarino.

ENVIRONMENT

Understanding Isla Navarino's wildlife starts with a look at the island's physical isolation and severe climatic conditions. Where exposure to the elements becomes extreme, vegetation is reduced to beautiful stunted forms. Sheltered north-facing slopes support the only true forests. As a result, there is less tree diversity compared with areas further north, with *lenga* and *coigüe de Magallanes* predominating, and waterlogged peat bogs and mossy lawns competing with the forest at all elevations.

The island has no native land-dwelling predators, although introduced stray and feral dogs are beginning to have a severe impact on the local ecology. Bird life is affected, including the ground-dwelling flightless steamer duck, which forages in flocks near meadows or streams; and the upland goose (*caiquén*), which also lives and nests in open areas close to water. The open alpine scrublands provide a favorable summer habitat for the fire-eyed diucon (*diucón*), an uncommon small grey-breasted bird with blackish-brown wings and red eyes; and an endemic southern subspecies of the yellow-bridled finch (*yal cordillerano austral*).

Isla Navarino's guanacos (ever more rare) are larger and heavier than those found either on the Fuegian or South American mainland. This appears to be the result of the absence of predators – even the indigenous Yaghan (or Yamana) people were essentially seafaring nomads less skilled in hunting agile land-dwelling animals.

Unfortunately, runaway dogs seem to be causing an alarming decline in guanaco numbers, though at least they may also be helping to control Isla Navarino's introduced North American beavers. Andean condors are surprisingly numerous, perhaps because dead beavers supply them with plenty of carrion.

CLIMATE

Isla Navarino has a stark subantarctic climate similar to that of the adjacent Argentine Fuegian Andes, though its mountains are somewhat more exposed to the fierce gales that frequently sweep in from the moody seas immediately south of the island. The Cordón de los Dientes shelters the northern coast of Isla Navarino from these southerlies, receiving up to 2000mm in precipitation annually. This falls fairly evenly throughout the year, but winter brings snowfalls right down to sea level. In the mountains, summer (December, January and February) temperatures average around 8°C – still less extreme than might be expected this far from the equator.

DIENTES CIRCUIT

Duration 5 days

Distance 53.5km

Difficulty moderate–demanding

Start/Finish Puerto Williams

Transport boat or plane

Summary This most southerly trek in the world leads around the spectacular rock towers of the Cordón de los Dientes.

The Dientes Circuit (*Circuito Dientes de Navarino*) leads around the jagged pinnacles known as Los Dientes de Navarino through a spectacular wilderness with raw rock ranges and hundreds of lakes. The Dientes are the highest summits on Isla Navarino, and are identifiable landmarks from around the island and from the Beagle Channel.

There are many naturally boggy areas, but in places beavers have flooded the forested valleys with their (usually shallow) dams.

Cairns, and numbered markers with painted red horizontal stripes on a white background mark the circuit. The numbering corresponds to the route description in the Bienes Nacionales *Circuito Dientes de Navarino* brochure (see Books).

The trek is normally done over four or five days in a clockwise direction. The trekking days laid out here are suggestions only. As good campsites can be found along much of the route, parties can move at their own pace. Numerous possible additional



side trips (such as to the Mirador de los Dientes, Lagunas Chevallay, Laguna Alta or even to Lago Windhond) could lengthen the trek by many days.

See also More Treks (p222) for more detail and a description of the trek to Lago Windhond.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trek is best done from early December to the end of March, although – provided the weather cooperates – more experienced and well-prepared parties can go at least a month earlier or later.

What to Bring

Since there are no *refugios* (or any other constructions) along the route, and only semisheltered campsites, trekkers must carry a good tent and all attendant equipment for an overnight stay

Maps

Two Chilean IGM 1:50,000 maps also cover the Dientes Circuit: *Puerto Williams* (Section L, No 190) and *Lago Windhond* (Section L, No 203). Although these maps fail to show many lakes and do not indicate the circuit route, they are otherwise quite accurate and very useful.

Books

The Chilean Ministerio de Bienes Nacionales (Ministry of National Resources) produced an excellent bilingual (Spanish-English) color brochure titled *Circuito Dientes de Navarino*, with a careful route description and contoured map (at a scale of approximately 1:121,000).

This brochure may be available in Punta Arenas (p199) from the **Bienes Nacionales** office (☎ 061-221651; Av España 981), and online (www.bienes.cl/rutas), but is hard to find on Isla Navarino itself. It is possible that places like Turismo Shila (p223) in Puerto Williams may have a copy that can be photocopied.

Permits & Regulations

Trekkers must leave their details, including expected return date, at the **Carabineros de Chile** (police station; Piloto Pardo). You are expected also to confirm the details of your expected return.

WARNING

This trek into the wild interior of Isla Navarino should not be taken lightly. It is not recommended for solo trekkers. Although somewhat protected by the mountains further to the west, the island experiences constantly unstable and often savage weather, with strong winds and summer snowfalls. The route is extremely isolated and mostly above the tree line in exposed terrain, where careful navigation and route finding is required.

THE TREK

Day 1: Puerto Williams to Laguna del Salto

4–5¼ hours, 12km, 710m ascent

The first section of the trek takes a cleared track up to Cerro Bandera. This is a popular day trek for locals. With light day-packs, the trip to Cerro Bandera can be done in around four hours return (carry water).

Walk along the street (Calle Teniente Andrés Muñoz Henríquez) out of town past the telecommunications station to **Plaza de la Virgen**, a small park at a road junction. Take the road (signposted 'Acceso al Sendero de Chile') and follow it gently up (past a turn-off going to a navy installation) through *canelo* and *coigüe* scrub beside the small **Río Róbalo**. The road reaches a small parking area at a tiny dam, 35 to 45 minutes from Puerto Williams. A short path crosses a footbridge below the spillway cascade to a picnic area with tables and firepits known as the **Mirador Cascada** – some people also camp here.

Do not take the path that follows the river, nor the one that heads east. Take the path into the woods that runs parallel to the river course above the bank. Follow horizontal red stripes on a white background – the markings of the Dientes Circuit – up increasingly steeply southeast through the Magellanic *lenga* forest. Fifty minutes to 1¼ hours on, the trees suddenly give way to wind-battered beech brush. A direct 20- to 30-minute climb straight up the grassy slope leads to **Cerro Bandera** (620m), though topping the peak is strictly extra credit. More a broad ridgetop than a summit, Cerro Bandera (Flag Mountain) was given its name when a large



sheet-metal Chilean flag was erected here in the early 1980s during a tense period of military confrontation with Argentina. Overlooking Puerto Williams, Cerro Bandera gives magnificent views stretching out along the Beagle Channel to Ushuaia and beyond.

Marker stakes and large cairns lead on along the exposed, stony plateau – first south, then southwest – across a small stream (the only water before Laguna del Salto). Cut to the right and begin a scenic undulating traverse with some narrow footing just above the scrub line. It crosses scree slopes alternating with areas of green, lawn-like *azorella* mounds and heathy *brecillo*. There are fine views across the lake basin of the upper Valle Róbalo to craggy peaks in the Cordón de los Dientes. When you reach a slope of loose, coarse talus coming down across the trail, carefully descend right in tight switchbacks via a tiny rock knob to reach the shore of **Laguna del Salto** (474m), two to 2½ hours from Cerro Bandera.

Semisheltered **campsites** can be found around the lake's southeast and northern shore. Aim to have minimum impact on this fragile, heavily used area and carry out all (perhaps including other peoples') rubbish. Look for pairs of Andean condors (nesting in the impressive bluffs at the head of Laguna del Salto) gliding high above.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: VIA VALLE RÓBALO

3¼–4¼ hours, 10.5km, 455m ascent

Less scenic, this sheltered lower route is a good option in bad weather. However, it requires some bushwhacking (pushing through undergrowth) and the thick brush can be a bother with a pack.

Turn right at the trail fork 10 minutes up from the parking area (see Day 1), and follow occasional markings (some are missing) of blue horizontal stripes on a white background southwest up very gently through *coigüe* and *lenga* forest. This sometimes-rough path leads along the true right (east) bank of the Río Róbalo to reach **Laguna Róbalo** after 1½ to two hours. This large lake offers pleasant **camping** and good views of the Dientes de Navarino. The route continues around the lake's southeastern

shore past another small tarn in the low forest, then climbs slightly southeast past the shore of another unnamed lake to reach Laguna del Salto, 50 minutes to 1¼ hours from Laguna Róbalo.

Day 2: Laguna del Salto to Laguna Escondida

3¼–4¼ hours, 9km, 560m ascent

Walk around to the cascading lake inlet to the right of the cascade, between the waterfall and the rock outcrop. Trek up the steep stream gully to a flat grassy area. The route climbs on via a minor ridge, cutting left across the stream before ascending through a rocky gap (sometimes called Paso Primero, although it is not a true pass) to reach a tiny shallow tarn on a barren shelf. Head up alongside the now trickling stream until it disappears at another tarnlet, then swing around left (eastward) up over rubble to arrive at **Paso Australia** (805m), 50 minutes to 1¼ hours from Laguna del Salto. Marked by a large cairn, the pass lies below the towering rock 'teeth' of the Dientes de Navarino and overlooks Laguna del Paso, filling in a deep glacial trough.

The route cuts down rightward over persistent snowdrifts toward the gap visible at the head of the lake. Traverse around high above Laguna del Paso over scree slopes and rock ledges to reach **Paso de los Dientes** (865m), after 30 to 40 minutes. The pass grants your first views south over Isla Navarino's spongy lowlands toward the mountainous Peninsula Hardy on neighboring Isla Hoste, and the misty islands around Cape Horn.

Drop gently past a tiny névé up to your right and skirt the left side of the elongated upper lake of the **Lagunas del Picacho**, between the spectacular east wall crowned by several rock pinnacles touching 1000m and the Picacho Diente de Navarino (1118m) – the island's highest summit on your left. The route leads around the west shore of the (smaller) lower lake to reach a sign-posted junction, 25 to 30 minutes from the pass.

To reach Lago Windhond, join the rougher track, marked by Snupie 1 (where *snupie* means 'route marker'), which continues down south.

The circuit route (marked with a red dot and Snupie 16 to the far right) turns away

westward, climbing across a minor ridge before it cuts down through *lenga* scrub to reach **Laguna de los Dientes**, after 30 to 40 minutes. Trace the beaver-chewed shoreline for 15 to 20 minutes around to an inlet stream on its northwest side, where you will find scenic **campsites** (GPS 55° 01.044 S, 67° 41.087 W) with views over this sizable lake to the Dientes peaks.

Climb moderately northwest through a tiny side valley past small tarns to a minor watershed under the impressive rock pinnacles of Cerro Gabriel (742m), where the starkly beautiful **Laguna Escondida** suddenly appears. Laguna Escondida (Hidden Lake) is enclosed on three sides by reddish craggy peaks and fringed by scree slides. Descend almost to a rocky bluff, then cut down left and follow the sometimes-bouldery (but always beavered) shore to the lake outlet, 40 to 50 minutes from Laguna de los Dientes. The exposed campsites here are not recommended, but there is sheltered **camping** a few minutes downstream.

Day 3: Laguna Escondida to Laguna Martillo

3–4¼ hours, 8km, 240m ascent

Follow the lake outlet 10 minutes down past small beaver ponds before cutting to the right over the stream. The route sidles on west through low *lenga* forest along the edge of tilted cliffs above more beaver dams and then into the head of a tiny side valley. It then ascends a small ridge to reach **Paso Ventarrón** (GPS 55° 01.350 S, 67° 43.413 W), one to 1½ hours from Laguna Escondida. This very windy saddle (696m) lies on the north side of **Cerro Denis** (737m) and is marked by a high cairn. Paso Ventarrón looks out southwest across the wild enchanting basin of the **Lagunas Chevallay** toward the mildly contoured Montes Cordrington (named by Captain Fitz Roy of the HMS *Beagle* after one of his crew, although Fitz Roy almost certainly intended the more striking Dientes).

Do not head directly down the slope, but first walk five minutes along the ridge before you begin a long descending traverse northwest over coarse talus into the *lenga* scrub to reach a first beaver dam. The route circles around the edge of this peaty basin above tarns and past fair **campsites** on occasional drier flat areas to the end of

an elongated lake. Here, cut up rightward through a bouldery chute and follow red markings up to **Paso Guérrico** (also called Paso de la Hermosa). This pass (572m) gives a fine view over Laguna Hermosa (Beautiful Lake) to Cerro Clem, the sharp southern summit of the Montes Lindenmayer (see boxed text Patagonian Pioneer Clem Lindenmayer p18).

The path first heads down southwest, traversing some way above the initially steep scrubby sides of Laguna Hermosa before it drops to the lake and continues around to reach the lake's northern shore, 1½ to two hours from Paso Ventarrón. There is scenic semisheltered **camping** in *lenga* scrub on both sides of the outlet. Look for ashy-headed geese (*canquén*) paddling the picturesque islet in this kidney-shaped lake. Make your way on down the stream's true right bank for 20 to 25 minutes to arrive at **Laguna Martillo** (Hammer Lake) with better **campsites** a short way back from this southeastern shore.

Day 4: Laguna Martillo to Laguna Los Guanacos

3½–5 hours, 10.5km, 420m ascent

Head around the right (northeastern) side of Laguna Martillo. Pass sporadic **campsites**, climbing over a small peninsula to reach a tiny clearing on the lake's northern 'hammerhead' section, after 30 to 40 minutes. Proceed for five minutes to the outlet (the Río Guérrico) and head downvalley through soggy meadows on the stream's northern side under an impressive row of rock spires in the Montes Lindenmayer to reach **Laguna Zeta** (424m), 30 to 40 minutes on.

Follow a small inlet stream of this Z-shaped lake southeast for five minutes to rejoin the marked route (which takes a more difficult short cut over scrubby ridges without passing Laguna Zeta). Continue northwest past a beaver pond to **Laguna Rocallosa** (GPS 54° 58.999 S, 67° 47.425 W). The route skirts the north shore of this small, elongated lake before rising over a crest into a waterlogged basin and climbing to a marker cairn on a small rock outcrop above **Laguna Islote** (Islet Lake; GPS 54° 58.575 S, 67° 47.802 W).

Cut up diagonally rightward into low *lenga* forest, then make a very steep and

muddy ascent directly against the slope to finally reach a grassy ledge beside a streamlet. (Due to heavy erosion this rather unsatisfactory section of the circuit may be rerouted at some future time.) Climb on, still quite steeply, through a grassy chute out of the trees, then traverse up northward to meet a stream coming from a broad barren plateau (GPS 54° 58.037 S, 67° 47.440 W). There are more marvellous views back south to the rugged Montes Lindenmayer and Laguna Alta (High Lake), a hanging lake with an outlet cascading into the Valle Guérrico, and northwest (along the Beagle Channel) to Ushuaia and the Cordillera Darwin. Peaks on the neighboring Isla Hoste also stand out.

Head up about 50m to the right of the stream past icy tarns, continuing northeast across the barren sloping plateau to reach **Paso Virginia** (829m), 1½ to 2¼ hours from Laguna Zeta. This point, the highest on the circuit, gives new vistas northeast across the Beagle Channel. Directly ahead the land falls away abruptly into Laguna Los Guanacos, a classic glacial lake in a deep, spectacular trough.

Take extra care in this section, which most trekkers approach tired from the ascent. Keeping well away from the often dangerously corniced precipice rim, walk 100m rightward to where red markings lead down through bluffs. The route then makes a rapid sliding descent that zigzags through coarse, loose scree slopes toward the lake. Cross the talus fields on the northwest side of Laguna Los Guanacos to reach the lake outlet, 50 minutes to 1¼ hours from the pass. On the opposite bank are scenic **campsites** sheltered by low scrub (and by the enclosed lake basin itself).

Day 5: Laguna Los Guanacos to Puerto Williams

4–5½ hours, 14km, 530m descent

From the campsites at the outlet to Laguna Los Guanacos, drop steeply along the true left (west) side of the **Estero Virginia** into the trees. Cross the tumbling stream immediately before you come out onto the boggy terrace surrounding Laguna Las Guanacas, after 15 to 20 minutes. There are excellent **campsites** here at the edge of the *lengas*.

Head around the right (eastern) shore, then continue down across another terrace

with several more beaver ponds. Many trail markings have been lost in this section. Follow a vague and somewhat rough trail, bushwhacking through coigüe forest along the right (east) bank of the stream. The trail eventually comes out into a tiny wet clearing covered with big, fleshy-leafed daisies (GPS 54° 56.686 S, 67° 44.002 W), just as the valley begins to open up. You are approximately one to 1½ hours from Laguna Las Guanacas.

Cut over rightward into fire-cleared slopes overlooking the picturesque Bahía Virginia and Caleta MacLean. Move down northeast through regenerating slopes of red *chauras*, *calafate* bushes and clover. In many places stock trails confuse the route, which follows a ridge above an abandoned seafood-processing plant (the former MacLean Centolla factory). It finally meets Isla Navarino's north coast road at the **Estero MacLean**, after a final 45 minutes to one hour. Just across the road bridge is **Los Bronces**, a picnic area (where trekkers have been known to camp).

From here, it's a pleasant 7.5km (two- to 2½-hour) walk east along the road past the Parque Etnobotánico Omora back to **Puerto Williams**. Occasional vehicles usually stop (even for trekkers who are not actually hitchhiking).

MORE TREKS

ISLA NAVARINO

Lago Windhond

In the uninhabited southern sector of Isla Navarino, Lago Windhond is a remote and utterly tranquil destination for camping and fishing. This three- to four-day, 41km trek passes through Fuegian forest, steppe and peat bogs, providing a suitable lowland alternative to Dientes de Navarino if the weather is poor.

The route goes north to south, either from the Cascada sector to Lago Windhond, returning via Rio Ukika on a dirt access road near Puerto Williams, or in reverse. Start at Cascada (ideal if the weather is good), following the directions for the first day and a half of the Dientes de Navarino trek (p217), then continue following markers to Lago Windhond. Directions are available online (www.bienes.cl/rutas). The